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## THE SONORAN MIGRATION.

BY J. M. GUINN.

The report of the discovery of gold in California travelled very slowly. In January, 1848, the telegraph had been in use but little over three years. The possibility of an ocean cable that would flash the news of the Old World to the New with almost the speed of light was regarded as the dream of visionaries or the babbling of lunatics. That great news gathering corporation, the Associated Press, had not been formed. The newspapers of that day devoted far more space to the politics of the country than to its material progress. The occasional correspondent furnished meager reports of events that happened beyond the ken of the editor and his limited staff. Under such conditions for news gathering it is not strange that it took nine months for the report of the discovery of gold in California to reach the eastern states.

Marshall picked up the first nuggets in the mill race at Coloma either on the 18th, 19th, 20th or 24th of January, 1848. The exact date of his discovery is, 62 years after, still in doubt. During his life time he gave three different dates, viz.: January 18th, 19th and 20th; and in the years intervening since his famous find three different anniversaries of the event have been celebrated—the 18th, 19th and 24th. The change from the 18th, which for a number of years was regarded as the true date to the 24th was made about fifteen years ago on the authority of an entry found in a diary kept by H. W. Bigler, a Mormon, who was working for Marshall on the millrace. The entry reads—"Jan. 24th. This day some kind of metal that looks like gold was found in the tail race." Although the California pioneers have adopted this date, it is not certain that it is the true one and the Territorial Pioneers still celebrate the 18th. The first announcement of the discovery in a San Francisco newspaper appeared in the Californian of March 15th, nearly two months after the first find of gold, and the great rush to the mines from San Francisco did not begin until the middle of May, four months after the discovery.

The first foreigners from beyond the limits of California to reach the mines were Sonorans or Sonorense, as they were sometimes called. While they were credited to Sonora there were among them

bands from Sinaloa, Chihuahua and Durango. Many of these had had some experience in placer mining in their own country, and the report of rich placers in California, where gold could be had for the picking up, aroused them from their lazy self-content and stimulated them to go in search for it. The first gold placers discovered in California—those located in the San Fernando mountains—discovered by Francisco Lopez, in 1841, had been worked mainly by Sonorans, most of whom left the country at the time of its conquest by the Americans. These returned with their numerous relatives.

Some of these Sonorans were intelligent men who came on their own responsibility, but the greater majority belonged to the peon class and were fitted out or grub-staked—to use a mining term—by their patrons who were to receive a share of their profits. Starting from Tubac, on the borders of Sonora they traveled over the old Anza trail to Yuma, then across the burning sands of the Colorado desert to the Pass of San Gorgonio, down the valley to Los Angeles, and up the coast to the mines.

They travelled in squads of from fifty to one hundred their meager belongings packed on mules or burros. They came in the early spring and returned to their native country in autumn. From this fact came the term, the Sonoran Migration. Some of them brought their women and children with them. Although they came early they were not welcomed to the Land of Gold. The Americans disliked them and the native Californias treated them with contempt. The men wore cotton shirts, white pantaloons, sandals and sombreros. Their apparel, like the Laws of the Medes and Persians, changed not nor did they change it as long as a shred of it held together. The native Californians nick-named them *Calzonaires blancos* (white breeches), and imposed upon them whenever an opportunity offered.

The story is told of a native California alcalde, or justice of peace, who had an office near the old mission church of San Luis Obispo. When a band of these Sonoran pilgrims came along the highway, which led past the old mission, they invariably stopped at the church to make the sign of the cross and implore the protection of the saints. This gave the alcalde his opportunity. Stationing his alguaciles, or constables, on the road to bar their progress he proceeded to collect fifty cents toll off each pilgrim. If word was passed back to the squads behind and they attempted to avoid the toll gatherer by a detour to the right or left the alcalde sent out his mounted constables and rounded up the poor Sonorans like so many cattle at a rodeo—then he and his alguaciles committed highway robbery on a small scale. Retributive justice

eventually overtook this unjust judge. The vigilantes hanged him, not, however, for robbing Sonorans, but for horse stealing. Had all who mistreated and robbed Sonorans in the early 50's been hanged the population of California would have been considerably reduced.

The methods of mining immediately after the discovery of gold were very crude; at first the only instrument used was a butcher knife, and so great was the demand for that article at the dry diggings above Coloma, forty dollars was refused for one.

The Sonorans introduced two new methods—panning and dry washing.

Before the iron gold pan came into use a *batea*, or dish shaped Indian basket was used. The basket was filled with gravel containing gold and it and its contents immersed in a pool of water. By a dexterous turning of the wrists the contents of the pan were kept in a continuous swirl until the earth was washed away and the gold was left in the bottom of the pan.

Dry washing was resorted to where the placer was a long distance from water. The pay dirt was dug out and spread on a canvass and dried by the sun. Then it was pulverized into dust and tossed by the pan full into the air in the same way that grain was winnowed in olden times. The gold dust fell into the pan and the earth was blown away by the wind. So rich were the first mines discovered that it was nothing uncommon for a miner with a pick, pan and shovel to make \$100 a day. In one instance a man dug out \$12,000 in six days.

No record was kept of the number of Sonorans coming into California. In a memorial to Congress in 1850 asking for the establishment of a Custom House at San Pedro, the memorialists say, "At least ten thousand Sonorans pass through Los Angeles on their way to the mines each spring, generally returning to Mexico in the autumn." These migratory birds of passage carried to their homes a considerable amount of gold. A thousand dollars was sufficient to elevate a peon to a plutocrat. This migration begun in 1848, reached its maximum in 1850—from that time it gradually decreased until in 1854 it had almost entirely ceased. Their persecution by the Americans, the foreign miner's tax, and the increased amount of labor required to get the gold, convinced these migratory nomads that there was no place like home, so they went home and stayed there.

Not all of them, however, returned to their native land. There was a residuum left in California.

From this was evolved some of the most daring desperadoes that ever infested California. Chief among these was Joaquin Murieta.

Lesser in ability but as deeply steeped in crime were his lieutenants, Poncho Daniel, Claudio, Pedro Gonzalez and Joaquin Valenzuela, all Sonorans.

Joaquin Murieta came to California in the migration of 1849. He was a bright, keen, handsome youth of 18 years. He had a fair education, and was well behaved. He had secured a good mining claim on the Stanislaus River and was making money. One day he was visited by a gang of American desperadoes of that detestable class that later formed the border ruffians of Kansas. He was peremptorily ordered to abandon his claim. In vain he protested that he had come by it honestly that he had paid the miners' tax and all other requirements. He was knocked down, beaten and driven out of the camp. He secured another claim; he was robbed of it. Then he turned gambler. The new vocation was well suited to the suave young Sonorense and fortune for a time seemed to befriend him. The miners' uncoined gold was raked into his ever expanding purse. But the fates were against him—while riding into town on a horse he had borrowed from his half-brother, he was accosted by an American who claimed the horse was stolen from him. Joaquin's protestation of innocence and offer to pay for the horse were met with howls from the half-drunken mob of "hang the greaser," "lynch him." He was hurried back to the ranch where he and his brother stopped. His brother was summarily launched into eternity from the branch of a tree and Joaquin was tied to its trunk and cruelly flogged. He marked in memory the faces of his persecutors and vowed vengeance on them. The lynchers left Joaquin with his dead, exulting in the deed they had done. But their exultations were turned to terror. One of the leaders in the outrage was shortly afterwards found stabbed to death, and others sooner or later met the same fate; some escaped by fleeing the country. In a few months Joaquin was at the head of an organized band of robbers that sometimes numbered twenty and at other times as many as eighty. Sometimes these acted together but usually they divided into bands under tried and trusted leaders. Joaquin was supreme in command. To disobey his orders was certain death.

There was hardly one chance in a hundred that a traitor could escape, for it was the duty and pleasure of the betrayed whose lives were jeopardized by the treachery, to hunt down and slay the informer.

From Shasta to San Diego this banditti raided the country, robbing and murdering—their victims mostly Americans. Throughout the mining camps were spies who kept Joaquin informed upon the yield of the various mining claims and where the gold was kept.

There were others in the settlements whose business it was to keep the band supplied with the best horses that could be obtained by theft. Pedro Gonzalez was captain of the horse thieves.

It is impossible now in the settled condition of affairs in California to conceive of the terror that Joaquin's band spread throughout the land. Time and again officers had started out to capture the leaders, but their hunt usually ended in their assassination.

Reward after reward had been offered for the leaders alive or dead, but the band remained intact, only a few of the inferior members being taken or killed.

For three years this reign of terror had continued, then the Legislature in May, 1853, passed an act authorizing Harry Love, a law abiding desperado of acknowledged bravery to hunt down and destroy the robber band. Love organized a body of twenty well mounted rangers and started on the trail of the banditti.

In the latter part of July, 1853, Love, with eight of his rangers, came upon a party of Mexicans in camp near Tejon Pass. They were preparing breakfast and had divested themselves of their arms. Apart from the gang a short distance a handsome young man richly dressed, was rubbing down a splendid horse. Love interrogated him on where he was bound. He said to Los Angeles. Another of the band gave a different destination. At that moment Byrnes, of Love's party, came up. He knew Joaquin; Love did not. The robber chief, finding he was detected, sprang on to his horse without saddle or bridle and dashed down the mountainside. The bullets of the rangers brought down his horse. Joaquin attempted to escape on foot but three balls pierced his body, and he fell dead. The gang were all either killed or captured. Among the killed was Manuel Garcia—better known as three-fingered Jack—one of the most bloodthirsty monsters that ever lived. He was a human tiger. The leader killed, the band rapidly dissolved. Most of Joaquin's captains met violent deaths. Claudio was killed in a midnight raid at Salinas; Paucho Daniel, who fled to Los Angeles to escape the wrath of his captain, was a year or two later hung by the Vigilantes from a beam of the old jail that used to stand on the corner of North Spring and Franklin Streets. Juan Flores, a subordinate of Joaquin's, was a part of the crop of the gruesome fruit borne by the gallows tree that formerly stood on Fort Hill. The whole population of Los Angeles turned out to see his taking off. He was but 22 years of age at the time he was hanged, and Joaquin was not quite 21 when he was killed. The majority of his band were young men, and a large proportion were Sonorans. The cruel treatment they received from the rough and brutal element among the Americans had much to do with driving

them to a criminal career. Another contributing cause was the constantly occurring revolutions both in Mexico and California. These had engendered in them a contempt for rulers and an utter disregard for law and order. For them it was not a very long step from revolution to robbery. The law of reprisal came in too. They had been robbed of their country by the Americans—it was a patriotic duty to rob the robbers. The better class of the Californians did not sympathize with the robbers. In 1857, when the Manilas band was terrifying Los Angeles, the most efficient person in hunting down and destroying the gang was Gen. Andrés Pico and a company of native Californians under his command. When he captured one of the robber band he did not turn him over to the authorities but strung him up to the most convenient tree and left him as a warning to his evil associates. Between 1851 and 1857 there were 35 executions by vigilantes in Los Angeles County.